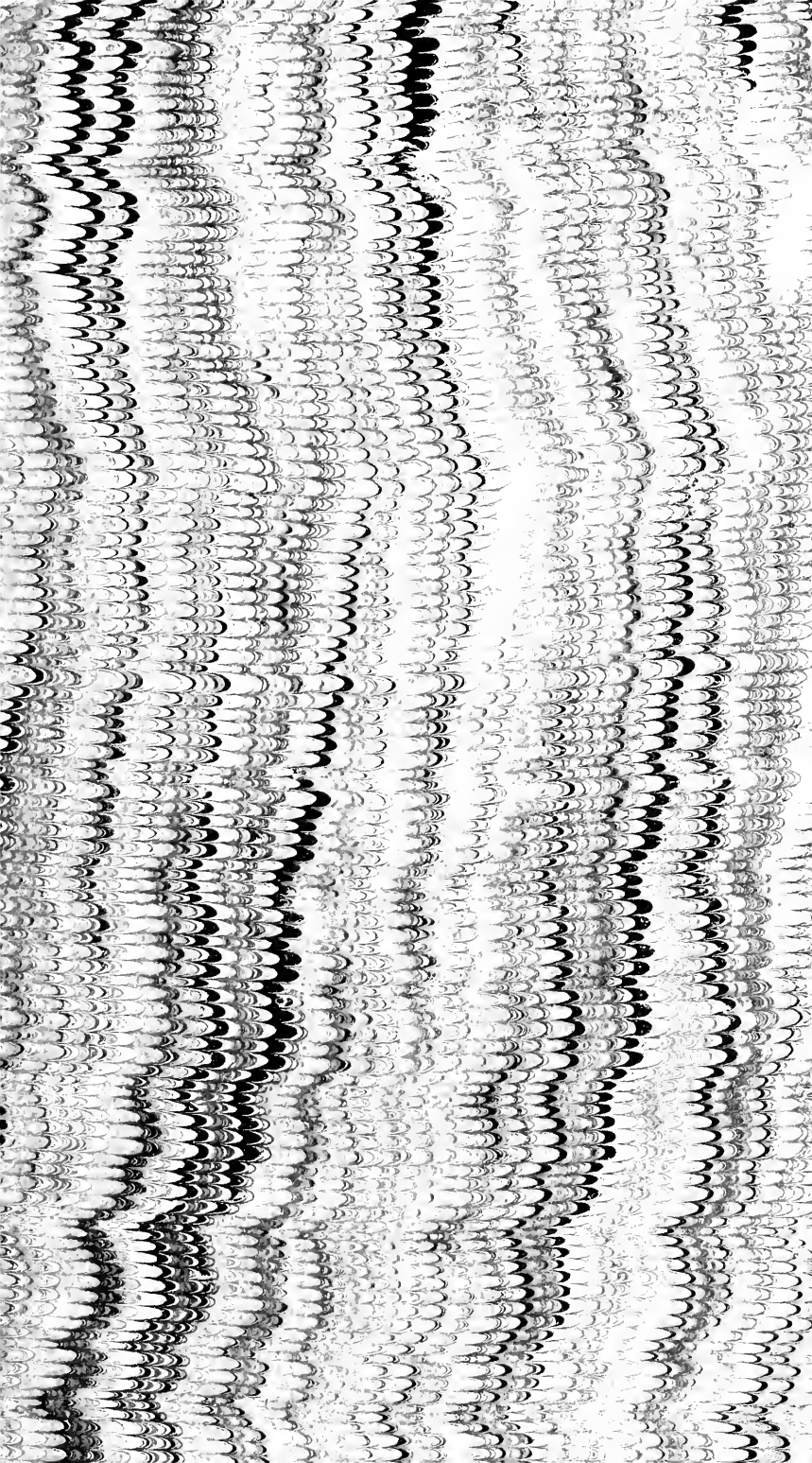


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AN

INAUGURAL ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

ON THE

SECOND TUESDAY OF FEBRUARY, 1820

BY DAVID HOSACK, M. D.

PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY

NEW-YORK:

PRINTED BY C. S. VAN WINKLE, PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY,

No. 101 Greenwich Street.

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN,

Members of the New-York Historical Society.

WHILE I acknowledge with gratitude the honourable distinction you have conferred upon me, I beg leave to assure you, that I accept this station, and enter upon its duties, with great humility. To this, the mind cannot be insensible, that appreciates the objects for which this institution was founded—the high respectability which it has attained under the auspices of those who have hitherto presided, and the duties which remain to be performed, in the fulfilment of the high expectations which the patronage of the state, and the liberal contributions of the friends of this association, have justly excited.

Allow me, for a moment, to mingle my feelings with yours, in calling your attention to the important services which have been rendered to the Institution, by those who have preceded me in this chair, and to acknowledge the obligations which they have imposed on their fellow members, and upon the community.

The honourable EGBERT BENSON, the first President of the New-York Historical Society, may be justly regarded

as its father and founder. While he presided over its destinies, and conducted it through the stages of its infancy, his exertions were unremitting, and his benefactions liberal. To found and organize an association like our own, is always a task accompanied by many obstacles; but to perpetuate its existence—to unite the zealous and active exertions of its members, requires the incessant anxiety and attention of its patrons. Some content themselves with the gratification of giving origin to a society, and then abandon it to the rude sport of neglect and accident; it belongs to enlightened, ardent, and vigorous minds, to conduct it along through paths of difficulty, until it secures a permanent and elevated character. Posterity will unite their gratitude with ours, for the unwearied efforts, and the laudable example, displayed in the official conduct of our first President.

Under the presidency of that accomplished scholar and eminent statesman, the late **GOUVERNEUR MORRIS**, this Society also received a great accession to its fame and usefulness, not only by the lustre of his talents, the elevated character which he sustained in the republic, and the public services which he had rendered at home and abroad, but by the constant devotion of his time to the interests and honour of his native land. His public discourses and communications, in which he was ever obedient to your call, will remain among the lasting literary monuments of the nation, and his name will find a place on the brightest page of her history. His family, since his decease, have not been unmindful of that attachment which he ever cherished and expressed in behalf of this Institution. By their liberality, and for which they deserve the warmest acknowledgments of gratitude, some of the most valuable coins and

medals of his cabinet, besides other donations, have been presented to this society.

Unconnected as I am by *political* ties with his successor in office, his Excellency DE WITT CLINTON, I trust that I shall not invade the sphere of party politics, when I notice the exertions and liberality which he has manifested in behalf of this Institution. To him we are largely indebted for much of its present prosperity. In his legislative capacity, he exerted his influence in promoting its interests, and eventually succeeded in obtaining the passage of the law, containing a grant of twelve thousand dollars. His agency in obtaining this donation was conspicuous. In addition to his literary labours, which the Society will ever appreciate with pride and satisfaction, his contributions have been numerous and valuable. And allow me to add, that upon declining a re-election, he requested that the Society might be assured of his warm and unremitting attachment to its welfare and reputation. There is reason to expect, that at some future day, additional and important services and donations may be received from our late respected President, whose zeal in elevating the character of his native state, is duly proportioned to the abilities, the learning, and the fidelity, which he has ever evinced in her service.

But, gentlemen, while we thus do homage to those who have filled the highest stations in this Society, we cannot be insensible to the great debt of gratitude which is due to another member of this association.* I need not here recount his long-continued and disinterested services. While the bond that unites us exists, they must continue to be recollected with grateful emotions. Nor have his exertions been confined to this Institution alone; they have been ex-

* John Pintard, Esq.

tended to most of the literary and benevolent associations which have recently exalted the character of our city. Those services can never be forgotten—they will live in the recollection of a grateful community, and will be the frequent theme of future eulogy.

To promote the object of this Institution, is the duty of every individual member, but especially of those who are invested with its honours.

I trust I shall not make an unreasonable demand upon your patience, if I make use of the present occasion to call your attention to some objects which, although they have fallen within the views of our Institution, have not been regarded in a manner correspondent to their importance.

The library of this Society particularly claims our notice. A classification of the numerous and valuable works of which it is composed, so as to render them more easy of research, appears to be much wanted; and it is essential, that the great mass of *Tracts* and *Pamphlets* should be assorted, bound, and have a place in the catalogue. It cannot be expected, that the gentleman* who holds the station of Librarian, can conveniently, with his numerous other avocations, devote the time that may be required for this duty. You will, perhaps, think it expedient to add to the standing committee of the Society, or to institute a distinct library committee to assist in these arrangements, as well as to afford their counsel in whatever may appertain to the augmentation and direction of that department.

To obtain every work connected with American history and literature becomes daily more important, as the United States rise in the estimation of the world. Our national character is becoming more elevated—our resources more

* The Rev. Mr. Schaeffer.

the subject of admiration—and our political institutions a source of remark and speculation in every civilized nation of the globe. Hence, the incidents of our early history—the struggles which we passed through in the incipient stages of national existence, and the virtues which we displayed in scenes of trial and suffering, will constitute a theme of anxious inquiry. To supply, by every possible means, the works necessary to complete our colonial history, therefore, demands our earnest exertions. Never should our researches cease or become languid, until every thing is accomplished within the bounds of industry and munificence, to supply the deficiencies of this department. It should also be a great consideration to preserve whatever may illustrate the national, civil, literary, medical, and ecclesiastical history of our country. Already our legislative acts, and judicial decisions, and, I believe, almost every historical treatise, are deposited in our library. These constitute the basis upon which every future historian must erect his structure; but it must be strikingly apparent, that in the infancy of our literature, newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets, are frequently the only printed evidences of public transactions; and although they are too often the organs of faction, and the vehicles of private malignity and disappointed ambition, they are the depositories of valuable knowledge, and form a partial commentary on the passing events of the day. Our collections, in this respect, are already highly respectable; and I beg leave to suggest the expediency of adopting such measures as may ensure to us every journal, magazine, review, and every other publication in this state. I would recommend an application to the proper authorities, in laudable imitation of the practice of Great Britain to her celebrated Museum, and of France to her Academy, to secure us a copy of every work printed

in the state, to be placed on the shelves of our library. Although, individually, many such productions are fugitive and comparatively insignificant; still, collectively, they contribute to show "the form and pressure of the times," and serve to convey to posterity the literary character, the prejudices, the passions, and even the follies of the age.

The cabinet of coins and medals, in consequence of the recent liberal donations from the heirs of the Rev. Dr. KUNZE, deceased, in connection with the contributions of the members of the Society, and the additions received from other sources, has attained a very respectable eminence, and is, probably, at this time, equal in value to any other collection in the United States. At this early period of our national existence, it is pre-eminently important to procure and preserve, as opportunities may offer, every medal that commemorates great public occurrences, in military and naval achievements. Never should we forget, that the recollection of momentous and illustrious events in the annals of mankind—exalted instances of valour and fortitude—and brilliant acts of individual prowess and virtue, have found their way to after generations, through this imperishable channel. These types and emblems of glory, have survived the ravages of time and revolution, and brought to light facts of interest and magnitude in the chain of history, when the states and empires in which they were struck, have slumbered in the dust for ages, and the mausoleum and the triumphal column lost their form, grace, and beauty. It is to be regretted that this subject excites so little consideration in the infancy of our Republic, when every thing touching our national fame is so keenly and universally felt. The march of nations is before us, and the gloomy night of darkness and ignorance that obscures their paths, to the eyes of posterity, may one day envelope our own, however bright the

sun of civilization may now beam upon us. If we would hold up the mirror of history, let us not forget our duty to ourselves, as well as to other times.

A committee on coins and medals having been some time since appointed to complete the arrangement, and to prepare a catalogue of the cabinet, it is presumed this duty has been performed, or is nearly accomplished, especially as such catalogue will form an important item in the next volume of our Collections.

Your Hall, gentlemen, is ornamented with a portrait of the founder of this cabinet, and you have designated the collection by his name—yet more is required; and allow me to express the desire we all cherish, that a biographical memoir of that learned professor and divine, be prepared under the auspices of this Society.

Connected with this subject, I suggest for your consideration, how far it may conduce to the accomplishment of one of the objects of this Society, to increase the number of the *portraits* of the eminent men of our country, particularly of the first settlers of this state, and the founders of the republic.

By such means we shall be able to give additional aid to the Fine Arts; they deserve, and should receive, more of our encouragement and support. It also occurs to me, that it may be productive of benefit to this Society, to appoint a committee for the express purpose of soliciting and collecting copies of American engravings, as well to illustrate our national history by the portraits of its heroes, its public characters, important events, and the scenery of our country, as to preserve and perpetuate specimens of the *graphic art*, which, though of modern introduction in the United States, has attained a degree of excellence that is little inferior to that of the old world.

The Society has been singularly fortunate in the nature and extent of its *manuscript* collection of facts and documents relative to the war of our revolution—some papers on that era of our national character remain yet to be gathered.

The recent war declared by Congress, in 1812, has afforded several historical works of unequal merit. Besides these compends, and others more extensive if they exist, it is the duty of the Historical Society of this State, to procure, as far as it is practicable, every original document on this subject. New-York was, in an especial manner, the scene of action; some of the most momentous events occurred in this state, and we owe it to ourselves to possess at least a portion of the original materials for the future historian.

Another subject deserves the attention of our Society. Considering the eventful age in which we live—the mighty geniuses which it has exhibited—and the extraordinary characters to which it has given birth, but few authentic biographies have been put on record. While the events in which distinguished men have participated are fresh in the recollection, and the anecdotes of their lives are familiar to their cotemporaries, great opportunities are afforded for correct portraits of character. Already has negligence in our own state suffered many interesting incidents in the lives of her early heroes, statesmen, and philosophers, to sink into oblivion. Indeed, while we allow these services and merits to remain unrecorded, we have little right to complain that foreign nations have done us injustice. No refutation of their calumnies can prove more effectual, than a fair exhibition of the virtues and talents of our illustrious men.

Among those who have served the state, with their commanding talents, but without any monument of our grati-

tude, the late Lieutenant Governor, Cadwallader D. Colden; the late Vice-President, the venerable George Clinton; the late Samuel Jones, and the Right Rev. Bishop Provost, have the highest pretensions to consideration. Although the first has secured to himself the permanent remembrance of posterity, by his invaluable history of the Five Nations, his correspondence with Dr. Franklin, and his medical disquisitions, yet no one has traced his various services to the Commonwealth, during an administration distinguished for important events, and scenes of danger and responsibility. The civil and military career of the late George Clinton holds forth a noble and fertile subject for the pen of genius and eulogy. His sagacity, his valour, his fortitude, and more than all, his stern unbending integrity, offer an example worthy to be retained in the temple of Fame, among the models of ancient virtue. Whoever shall trace out his acts in the cabinet and in the field, and draw the faithful picture of his character, will expand the lustre of a great name, contribute to the celebrity of the state, and to the honour of the nation. When such a man arises on the theatre of public life, it is to guide and to save; and if there be talent or power to perpetuate the memory of his deeds, a proud and enlightened people should never slumber over an apathy that is daily consigning them to neglect.

I rely on the testimony of others, when I speak of the eminent legal talents of the late Samuel Jones: common consent has indeed assigned him the highest attainments in jurisprudence, and the appellation of the Father of the New-York Bar. He justly ranked among the most profound and enlightened jurists of this or of any other country; and acted a useful and conspicuous part in organizing our courts and judiciary system, in this state, after the close of the revolution. His industry, his purity

of character, and his extensive acquirements, present an inspiring example to the young candidate for future renown. It is also to be earnestly hoped, that the evidence of the varied learning and elegant literature of the late Bishop Provost, whose life embraces much of the early history of the Church, will not rest on the oral testimony of his cotemporaries; but that some gentleman of congenial feelings and pursuits may be selected, who will assume the task of making them known to posterity.

The Cabinet of Natural History belonging to this Society was first established in 1816. At that time no other public institution existed in this city, for the collection and classification of the objects of this department of knowledge, or for obtaining the mineralogical and other natural productions of the United States. Since that period, the Lyceum of Natural History has been organized; and, under the auspices of its learned and efficient President,* supported by the zeal of its young and active members, has acquired character and reputation, and promises to be eminently useful in the cultivation of this branch of science.

Under these circumstances, it merits our consideration, how far the benefit that was contemplated by the Historical Society, in the erection of this department of Natural History, will not be more essentially and completely accomplished by the Lyceum, and whether the proposed transfer of the Cabinet will not prevent collision in our labour, and by concentrating the objects in view, promote the interests of science, and advance the respectability of the New-York Institution.†

* Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill.

† Since the delivery of this Address, the object here suggested has been carried into operation.

I feel it my duty here to suggest the propriety of instituting a gold or silver medal for the best topographical and statistical account of the different counties of the state. In the memoirs of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, there are accounts of several counties in that state, particularly one by that late learned and distinguished theologian and scholar, Dr. Dwight; and I cannot deem it unbecoming the dignity of our Society, to imitate the meritorious example of our eastern brethren. If, however, contrary to all expectation, this suggestion should prove unsuccessful, through the opposition of the ignorant, or the evil minded, for the *Bohon Upaz* is not exclusively the product of Java, vigorous exertions to the same purpose should not be spared to obtain the aid and co-operation of active members in different sections of the state. Every thing touching the power and resources of any section of the immense empire on this side of the Atlantic, over which millions of freemen are diffusing civilization, arts, and refinement—every thing calculated to reveal moral and physical strength, is eminently entitled to attention. It gives confidence, and imparts enterprise at home; it inspires admiration, and commands respect in foreign countries.

The settlement of the western counties of this state is so recent, that many of the original settlers are still living, from whom may be easily procured every fact of importance. The state of New-York was once the residence of a tribe of Indians, by far the most distinguished of any who have been known on this continent. Their manners, their history, and above all, the monuments of art which they have left behind them, invite the attention of all those who delight to contemplate the native, moral, and intellectual character of our species. The most enlightened nations have, by direct effort, encouraged such inquiries.

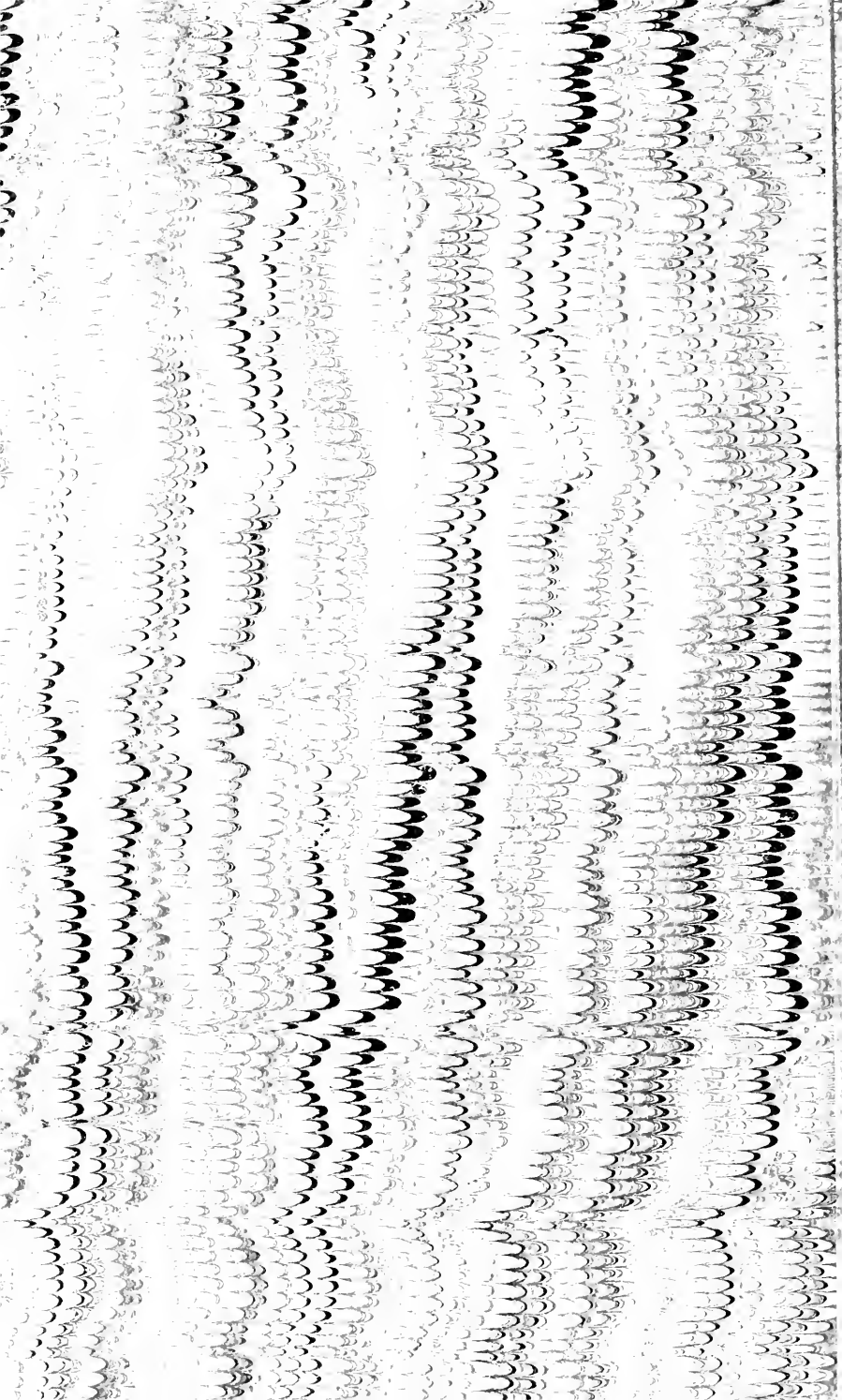
The *statistical views of Scotland and of Ireland*, have been read or heard of by us all. The late Emperor of France had nearly completed a survey of his dominions on a gigantic scale, and the English nation are now in the successful prosecution of a similar design.

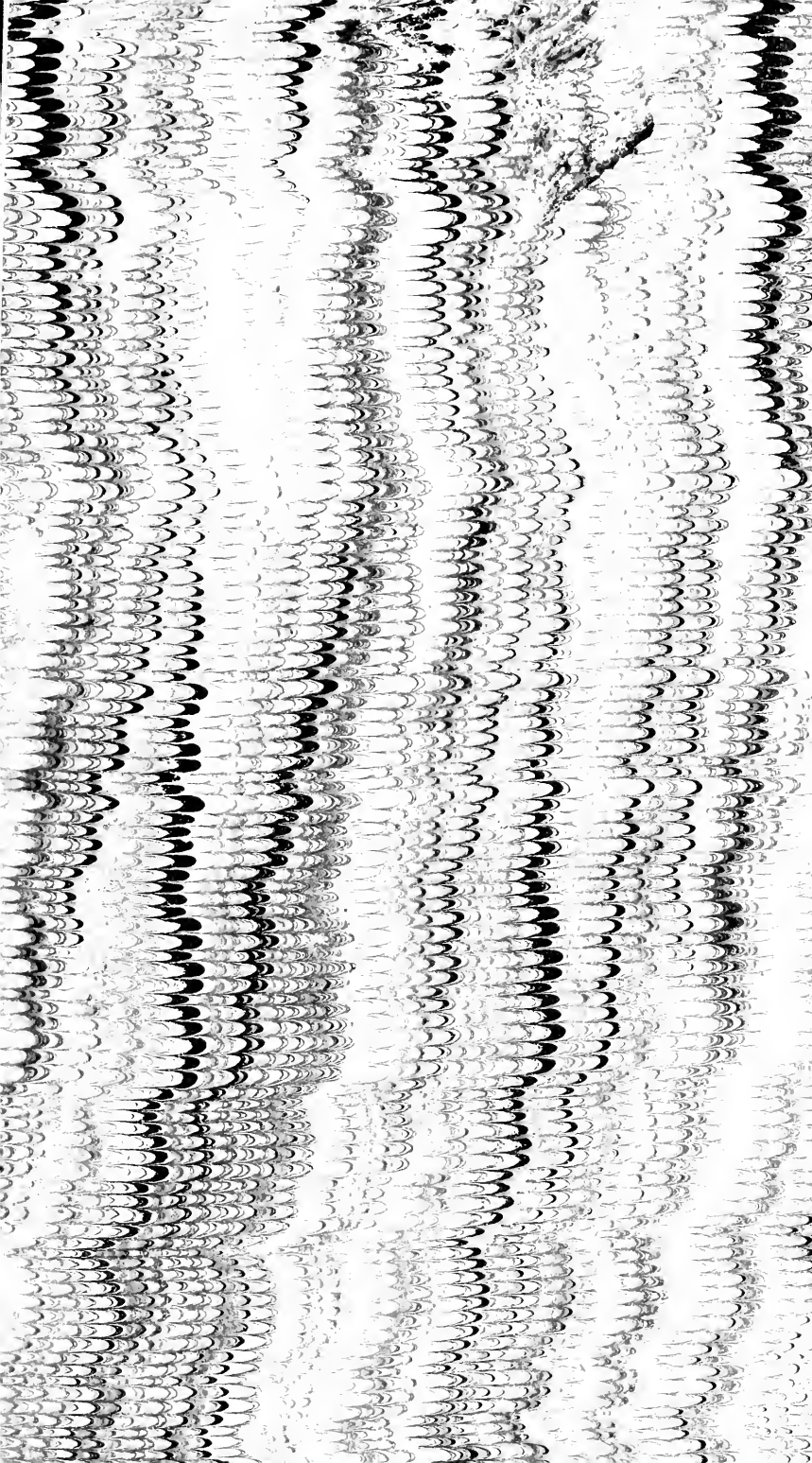
The publication of a *third* volume of the collections of this Society appears to be loudly demanded. It is with some pain I observe, that this Institution has existed upwards of sixteen years, and that only two volumes of its transactions and papers have appeared, whilst the Historical Society of Massachusetts, in little more than the same period of time, has published no less than sixteen volumes.

The deficiency on our part, cannot have arisen from lack of materials, but from the want of patronage, for our shelves are stored in rare printed tracts, and in manuscripts of great value. If every member of this Society would enter into an obligation to purchase a copy of each volume of its transactions as it may appear, the price of which would be amply remunerated by the value of its contents, the Society would be enabled, by this security alone, to publish an annual volume of its papers and communications.

This measure would not only be the means of preserving important documents from oblivion, but at the same time would direct that attention to the history of our own country, which is now in a great degree devoted to that of modern Europe, or to a classical and critical acquaintance with that of Greece and Rome.







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